

Nordic language policy
How far have we come? OR: From
golden years to sundry projects?

IAAS

Copenhagen 10.08.2018

Frans Gregersen

Overview

TWO sections:

- **1:** PRE-history: From the Helsinki treaty 1962 until 2001
- **2:** The declaration on language policy and the work of the Nordic Group on Parallel Language Policies at Nordic Universities

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**PRE-HISTORY:
FROM THE HELSINKI TREATY 1962
UNTIL 2001**

The Helsinki treaty

Cultural Co-operation

Article 8

- Educational provision in the schools of each of the Nordic countries shall include an appropriate measure of instruction in the languages, cultures and general social conditions of the other Nordic countries, including the Faeroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands.

² New wording in 1983

The first years: Language boards

- According to Agazzi et al.: *Guldtavlorna i gräset*, the first fifty years were a golden age where Nordic collaboration was firmly established with the various national *language boards* as the driving force.
- Areas of collaboration: TERMINOLOGY: it was deemed essential to alleviate Nordic collaboration by creating equivalent terms within the specific areas of traffic (SAS), postal services and media; ORTHOGRAPHY: too late for breakthroughs cf. Karker and LEXICON: the creation of new general words to substitute for loanwords

The Nordic language secretariat

- Nordic collaboration would be furthered if there was a focus and a stable organization to help it: The Nordic Language Secretariat was established (1978) - and shut down in 1996
- Gradually it dawned upon the language boards and their leaderships that they were to forge new LANGUAGE POLICIES for the Nordic member states
- The importance of the Westman and Telemann paper 1997: Behöver Sverige en nationell språkpolitik?

WHY?

- The Council of Ministers evaluated the moneys spent on Nordic collaboration in general and as a consequence a number of permanent Inter-Nordic institutions were closed – very few have survived!
- This was a trend towards a project economy where funds were meant to *supplement* national funds in order to create ***Nordic added value***
- Furthermore, the politicians probably felt that they spent a lot of money on Nordic collaboration but could not see the effects!
- Did people actually understand each other better in the Nordic region as a consequence of the Nordic language secretariat? they would ask

The new order

Directing the efforts towards Nordic added value:

- The role of the Council of Ministers
- The role of the committees
- The role of the secretariat
- The role of the experts

PRIORITY from 2014 and onwards: language comprehension of children and youngsters

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**THE WORK OF THE NORDIC GROUP
ON PARALLEL LANGUAGE POLICIES
AT UNIVERSITIES**

The Nordic declaration (2006)

- Background
- Content and structure
- Effect

- You may download the text from this site:
- <http://sprogkoordinationen.org/sprogpolitik/nordisk-sprogpolitik/deklaration-om-nordisk-sprogpolitik-2006/>

The declaration's background

- The Nordic Council of Ministers are in charge of the Nordic Cooperation
- They wanted a document which would focus the effort
- As it turned out they did not want to make the declaration legally binding as such but they committed to working in the direction outlined in the declaration

PROCESS

- written by a group of Nordic scholars and then delivered to the Nordic Language Board
- sent to all interested parties with a call for a response within a not too strict time limit (actually a lot of comments were received)
- after the hearing changed accordingly by the Nordic Language Board
- delivered to the Nordic Committee of civil servants so that they could prepare the text for the final signing process during the assembly of the Nordic members of parliament (Nordisk Råds session) 2006

Structure

- A **preface**, an **introduction**, a main text of **declaration** and a **background paper**
- ◆ The preface states that the ministers are agreed to work in the directions specified in the main text
 - ◆ The introduction states the terminology used (and the background paper explains it)
 - ◆ The text itself states: the point of departure, the aims and objectives (based on the rights of every citizen living in a Nordic country) and finally details four questions to be worked on in future collaborative efforts

Rights

Anyone living in the Nordic region has a right

- to acquire the language of the society he or she is living in
- to acquire a Scandinavian language
- to acquire an internationally significant language
- to maintain and develop his or her L1

Aims for a common policy

- that everybody is capable of reading and writing the society-upholding language of his or her country
- that everybody in the Nordic region may communicate freely with each other - if necessary through an interpreter
- that everybody has knowledge of their own language rights and the language situation in the Nordic region
- that everybody has very good knowledge in one language and in addition knowledge of at least one more internationally important language
- that everybody gets support for the development of their L1
- that everybody has general knowledge of what language is and how it works

The four areas to work with in further collaboration

- language comprehension and language skills
- parallel use of languages
- multilingualism
- the Nordic region as a forerunner in Europe

Fak/Land	DK	IS	SE	NO	FI
Health	10	18	-	18	-
Science/ Tech	3	3	0.5 (Physics)	5	4
Social	36	48	64 (Law)	50	50
HUM	44	55	55 (Hist.)- 15 (Ling.)	50	47

A comparison based on: Hvor parallelt

All numbers concern the percentage of the total of scientific publications which were published in the local Nordic language (for Finland both Finnish and Swedish). The Danish and Norwegian figures are for the whole country and concern the year 2010 while the figures for Sweden only concern selected disciplines as noted. Finally, the figures for Iceland are for doctoral theses only and concern only the University of Iceland whereas the Finnish figures are for the University of Helsinki only.

The Work of the NMR Group

- Indicators for Inter-Nordic comparisons
 - comparisons are difficult now; nevertheless: English is rapidly gaining ground, annual measures may be the right way
 - baseline information once and for all: Language policies or only internationalization policies
- Biannual reports:
 - Masters' theses, PhD theses and scientific output by staff (English or Nordic) in English or Nordic?
 - Educational matters: Numbers for: Exchange students and full degree students; BA/BS, MA/MS and PhD educational programmes taught in English (as announced)
 - international staff hired in the year reported on

The work of the NMR group

- Survey of best practice
 - language policies in place and clear anchoring at the university
 - monitoring systems and non-dogmatic follow up: a democratic process perspective
 - differences between traditions within the university as to internationalization: one size does not fit all
 - language support of various kinds offered to students, scientific staff and administrative personnel: parallel languaging taken seriously
 - focus on the role of universities in ‘their’ local societies: the plight of the university varies a lot
 - integration of language perspectives in internationalization policy and quality monitoring policies: hiring the best is not enough, we need to keep the very best
 - reformation of language courses! (CLIL? EMI? International classroom!)

The new (urban) reality

- In all the Scandinavian countries, urban centres include many immigrants
- These immigrants do not necessarily understand the 'neighbouring (Scandinavian) languages, even though they (have) acquire(d) mastery of one of them as an L2
- Many of these immigrant groups include upwardly mobile youngsters of intrinsic interest to the educational system and universities in particular

The asymmetry between production and perception

- *Lingua receptiva*
- The Nordic model:
- Understanding the relevant Nordic language and speaking English; speaking a Nordic language and understanding English
- The role of the educational system
- Proficiency levels in production and comprehension and the discussion about ELF

LINGUA RECEPTIVA

LINGUA RECEPTIVA means a conscious and concerted effort by the relevant university authorities to

- teach internationals, whether full degree students or teachers/researchers, to master comprehension of the local Nordic language while not teaching them production

- teach local Nordic students and researchers/teachers to understand English (or other lingua francae) well enough for them to participate in interaction with internationals

Why is it so hard?

- Teaching spoken language comprehension instead of written language
- Teaching academically useful and discipline specific **genres, discourse** and **lexis** (terminology)
- Teaching academically useful **interaction**: e.g. lecturing, taking questions, supervising, exams
- Maybe it is hard to practice for simple interactional (politeness) reasons
- Or maybe it isn't hard at all?

The alternative?

The alternative to English as the European lingua franca might be a conscious effort to promote a regionally divided Europe with a number of related languages based on the concept of **receptive bi- or multilingualism**:

- German: Germany, Austria, parts of Switzerland, but could that include also: Dutch: The Netherlands, (the Flemish part of) Belgium and what about Luxemburg?
- 'Romance': France, the French speaking part of Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, parts of Switzerland, Roumania
- English: United Kingdom, Ireland
- 'Slavic': Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Bulgaria; RUSSIA?!

If you want to read yourself...

- Here are the links to the reports:
- English version (with a Swedish summary):
- <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-5231>
- Scandinavian version:
- <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-5230>

Conclusion

- There is a permanent clash between researchers and civil servants/politicians in this area
- Researchers want to get new knowledge and want to establish baselines in order to show changes
- Civil servants and politicians want to operate a system of the possible and get immediate value for the money they invest (our money, actually)
- At the moment the politicians and the civil servants have won the day
- But maybe there is a tomorrow....